

TABLES CHALLENGE GUIDE

THREE MEALS. REAL PEOPLE. PURPOSEFUL PRESENCE.

A practical reference for three meals designed to help us practice hospitality, listen well, and make room for people.

THE CHALLENGE

Host three meals with people you might not naturally sit across the table from. Keep it simple: dinner at home, lunch after church, coffee and dessert, takeout at a park, or a potluck all count.

1

THE NEIGHBOR TABLE

Someone near you, but not yet truly known by you.

Notice who God has already placed nearby.

2

THE DIFFERENT STORY TABLE

Someone whose background or life experience differs from yours.

Listen with humility. Learn a real story.

3

THE FAITH JOURNEY TABLE

Someone whose relationship to faith is different from yours.

Make room for honest spiritual conversation.

THE POSTURE

- Don't host to impress. Host to make room.
- Don't listen to correct. Listen to understand.
- Don't force the moment. Trust God with the conversation.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- People feel welcomed, not managed.
- Conversation is genuine, not programmed.
- You leave knowing more of someone's story.
- A next step may emerge, but it is never forced.

REMEMBER

The meal is real. The friendship is real. The purpose is real too. The goal is not to manufacture a spiritual moment. The goal is to love the person in front of you and practice the welcome of Christ.

THE NEIGHBOR TABLE

TABLE ONE

A meal with someone who is near you, but not yet truly known by you.

PURPOSE

Pay attention to the people God has already placed nearby. Sometimes loving our neighbor starts by slowing down enough to know a name, hear a story, and make room for real conversation.

WHO MIGHT YOU INVITE?

- A literal neighbor.
- A coworker.
- A family from school or a team.
- Someone from the gym or a regular stop.
- A person you see often but barely know.

KEEP IT EASY

- Choose familiar food: tacos, burgers, soup, pizza, breakfast-for-dinner.
- Aim for a conversational group. Six to ten people usually works well.
- Start with ordinary life. Curiosity matters more than an agenda.

A SIMPLE INVITATION

"We've been meaning to have you over. Would you want to come by for dinner one night?"

GOOD QUESTIONS

- What brought you to this neighborhood, school, team, workplace, or area?
- What has been life-giving for you lately?
- What meal, tradition, or place feels like home to you?
- What is something people might not know about your story?
- What is your family looking forward to in this season?
- Where do you feel most connected these days?
- How can neighbors be better neighbors to each other?
- How can we pray for or encourage you right now?

HOSTING POSTURE

Warm, normal, and unhurried. Listen more than you talk. Look for common ground. This table does not need a deep agenda to be meaningful.

THE DIFFERENT STORY TABLE

TABLE TWO

A meal with someone whose background, culture, generation, family situation, life experience, or perspective differs from yours.

PURPOSE

Practice learning, honor, and compassion. Difference is not something to avoid. This table is about hearing one person's actual story - not asking them to represent an entire group.

THE POSTURE

- Lead with humility, not curiosity for curiosity's sake.
- Think: "Help me understand your story," not "Let me tell you what I think about your story."
- Start with ordinary life before heavier topics.
- Avoid assumptions, stereotypes, and turning the meal into an interview.
- Do not feel responsible to correct every statement you disagree with.

A SIMPLE INVITATION

"Our church is doing a table challenge this fall, and one invitation is to share a meal with someone whose life experience is different from ours so we can listen and learn. We thought of you and would love to have dinner together."

GOOD QUESTIONS

- What place, tradition, or memory shaped who you are?
- What did your family table look like growing up?
- What from your background or story are you grateful for?
- What do people sometimes misunderstand about your experience?
- Where have you felt especially welcomed? Where have you felt like an outsider?
- What do you wish people would ask instead of assume?
- Who has been an important influence in your life?
- How can we be better neighbors to people with stories different from our own?

WHEN DIFFERENCES COME UP

You do not have to win the moment. Listen carefully. Ask a question before offering an opinion. Trust that meaningful conversations often require patience.

THE FAITH JOURNEY TABLE

TABLE THREE

A meal with someone whose relationship to faith is different from yours.

PURPOSE

Create space for honest spiritual conversation with someone who may be skeptical, curious, hurt by church, from another faith background, new to faith, or returning after time away. This is not a debate, trap, or sales pitch.

HOW TO HOST THIS TABLE

- Be honest that faith matters to you, without making anyone feel ambushed.
- Ask questions before offering answers.
- Listen for pain, curiosity, confusion, and openness.
- If someone shares church hurt, do not minimize it.
- It is okay to say you do not have a quick answer.
- If you pray, do it naturally and without pressure.
- Look for a next step, but do not force one.

A SIMPLE INVITATION

"Our church is practicing meaningful conversations with people who may be in different places spiritually. No pressure and no weird agenda - we'd just love to share a meal and hear more of your story."

GOOD QUESTIONS

- What was your experience with faith or church growing up?
- What has shaped the way you think about Christianity?
- Where would you say you are spiritually these days?
- What questions about faith feel most honest to you right now?
- What gives you hope?
- What makes faith difficult to believe or trust?
- What do you admire about Jesus, if anything?
- What would make spiritual conversation feel safe and helpful rather than pressured?

IF YOU PRAY BEFORE THE MEAL

"Before we eat, I'm going to thank God for the food and for the chance to be together. No pressure to participate - we're just really glad you're here."

QUICK REFERENCE

KEEP IT SIMPLE. MAKE ROOM. PAY ATTENTION TO PEOPLE.

Use this page before, during, or after any of the three Tables.

BEFORE

- Invite simply and honestly.
- Choose an easy meal.
- Pray for the people coming.
- Plan for conversation, not performance.

DURING

- Welcome warmly.
- Let the meal be a meal.
- Ask a few good questions.
- Listen more than you talk.
- Don't force a spiritual moment.

AFTER

- Send a simple follow-up.
- Mention something you appreciated.
- Invite another next step only if natural.
- Keep praying and trust God.

HELPFUL RESPONSES

- Tell me more about that.
- I can understand why that would be hard.
- Thank you for being honest about that.
- I hadn't thought about it that way before.
- That's a really important question, and I don't want to give you a rushed answer.
- I'd love to keep talking about that sometime.

THREE TABLES AT A GLANCE

TABLE	WHO	FOCUS	POSTURE
NEIGHBOR	Someone already near you	Notice + connect	Warm, low-pressure
DIFFERENT STORY	Someone with a different life story	Listen + learn	Humble, curious
FAITH JOURNEY	Someone in a different place spiritually	Hear + make space	Patient, honest

THE GOAL

Love the person in front of you. Make room for a real conversation. Build enough trust that deeper conversations can continue. Trust God with what happens next.